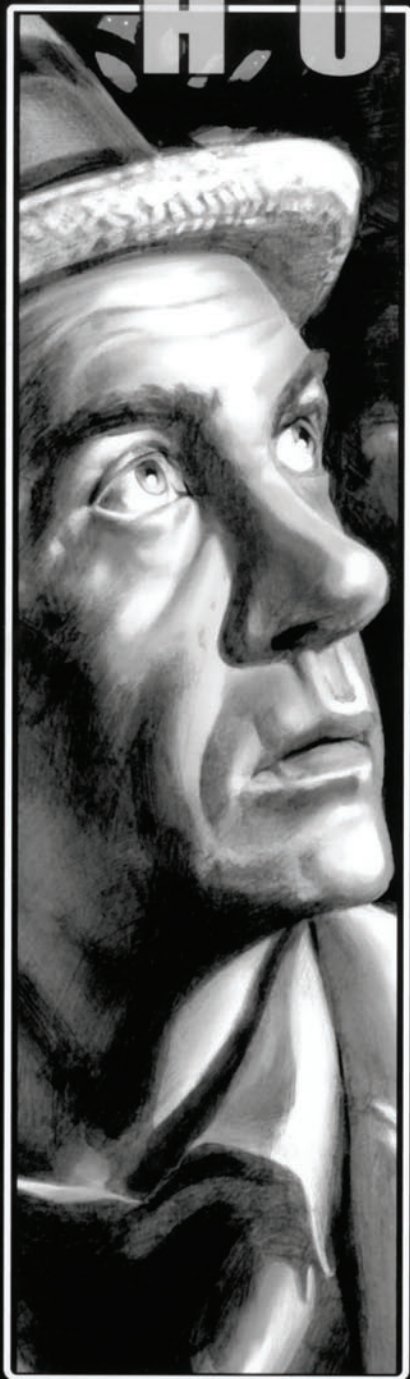


KOLCHAK:

The Night Stalker

the LOVECRAFTIAN HORROR



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Printed in China.

A camera went off in my eyes.
Quite a story, Carl."

It was not the worse thing that had happened to me that morning, and I was fairly certain it would not be the last. In fact, the growing sarcasm being thrown at me by the back of my mind was letting me know that being blinded was probably going to be the high point of my day.



"Buckin' for that Pulitzer again, eh, Mr. Kolchak?"

I smiled as graciously as I could. And, I must admit, for a complete and total fraud I pulled it off admirably. Still, the knowledge that I could so shame-facedly make complete and utter fools out of those closest to me with a pack of bald-faced lies was not making me feel any better over having done it. Perhaps I should explain.

What I had wanted for more years than I care to remember had finally happened. I, Carl Kolchak, had finally broken a titanic story. I was suddenly a household word, a journalistic hero. And, the only part of that which bothered me, the truth so diligently being ignored by all those gathered was that I was being honored for a story I really didn't write. Oh, much of what appeared under my by-line is true... -sort of. The way the story of the Immaculate Conception is true.

Sort of.



As everyone in the staff room continued to cheer and pass around the level of champagne the offices of the Hollywood Dispatch can afford, I accepted my fraudulent role as one of the world's best and bravest news hounds.

It was a bribe I had been handed by a grateful government, and which I had accepted because it was the only thing anyone in my situation could have done. It made me feel lousy, and after another round of humiliating hugs and embarrassing handshakes, I finally managed to corral my editor and force him into his office.

Now, for those who have not had the pleasure of his company, Tony Vincenzo is a round sort of man, a small, dried-out Brooklyn-born Sicilian. That he now lived in California only goes to show how

hard the proud people of Brooklyn will work to disassociate themselves from those with whom they do not wish to tolerate any longer. Happy with me for once, he turned into a less honest version of the self I had learned to tolerate over the years. Luckily, life had handed me a way of cooling his ardor for my talents.

Getting him behind his desk, I told him to sit down. Drink in hand, he slid behind the great wooden bear of a desk he has dragged with him from one office to the next and looked at me as if



he was already well beneath happy with me. Caring less about such things than ever, I pulled a piece of paper from my pocket as I told him;

"Vincenzo, you may have all the fame and glory you want for the Dispatch that you ever dreamed was possible, and this may be a thing of great joy for you—"

"Just tell me why you dragged me in here, Kolchak."

"I'm getting to that part. I know you're a very happy man right now, quite pleased with us scooping the world, but I have to tell you how it happened. Where it all came from."

"Carl, please ..."

"No," I told him, working up a note of sincerity I didn't know I could reach, "you have to let me do this. Someone has to know the truth."

"Oh, God." That was his immediate reaction. He stared at me for a very intense second, his beetle-like eyes squinting harshly, then he raised his glass as if he were going to toss the whole thing down in a gulp. Something stayed his hand, though, and he started to speak again as if just changing his tone could send me off in a different direction.

"Now, Carl," he started, "you're not going to spoil my good mood, are you? I mean, please reconsider any such actions." The happiness was fizzing out of him, like air escaping from a birthday balloon.



Taking a long sip from his tumbler, he added;

"I deserve a good mood, you know. I mean, let's face it, ever since I met you I've had so few of them. You don't want to pull this all away from me, now-do you?"

I knew it wasn't fair, what I was about to do to him. But, it was more unfair for me to live a lie, and I knew he would feel the same when I was done. Of course, the back of my mind reminded me, I'd been sure I knew a lot of other things a few days earlier, as well. Forcing myself to refrain from any further caustic comments, I simply told him;

"I'm going to read you something, Vincenzo. It's a statement I left with the Department of the Navy."

The little, clown doll eyes of my editor rolled in their plastic ball sockets. As he stared at me, I cleared my throat, then asked that he let me finish before he interrupted. As he threw back the last of his drink, I began reading.

"On Saturday, August 17th of this year, the United States Navy did swiftly and with courage to spare, launch an invasion on the coastal region to the north of Rogers, California. Despite the resultant loss of American lives and the significant property damage that ensued, in this reporter's



opinion, they had no other choice. The marines that landed on what can only be described as Hell's beachhead that night fought their way through an invasion force the equal to any that has ever been assembled at any time throughout history.

"I say this under no coercion; this I swear on Menchen's grave. No warrior group has ever faced a more terrible enemy than these men. None has ever gone into combat for a higher principle. What little I was witness to was brutal, twisted-maddening. And I mean truly maddening. It has been rumored lately that those who died in that hideous combat were the lucky ones.